

LOUIS CLARK VANUXEM FOUNDATION

PHILOSOPHY
AND CIVILIZATION IN
THE MIDDLE AGES

BY
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Philosophy and Civilization in the Middle Ages

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PREFACE

THE material of these lectures, which I had the honor of delivering at Princeton University, on the Vanuxem Foundation, was prepared, during the War, at the Universities of Harvard, Poitiers, and Toronto. Certain portions of the work, relatively few, have already appeared in the form of articles, viz.: part of Chapter I in the *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, July, 1918; Chapter IV, ii, in the *Philosophical Review*, July, 1918; Chapter V, iii, in the *International Journal of Ethics*, January, 1919; Chapter III, ii, and Chapter VII, i-v, in the *Harvard Theological Review*, October, 1918. These now take their place as integral parts of what may be regarded as a supplement to my *History of Mediaeval Philosophy*.

The purpose of the study as here presented is to approach the Middle Ages from a new point of view, by showing how the thought of the period, metaphysics included, is intimately connected with the whole round of Western civilization to which it belongs. My work represents simply an attempt to open the way; it makes no pretense to exhaustive treatment of any of the innumerable problems involved in so vast a subject.

I desire to express my cordial thanks to the friends who have aided me in translating these lec-

tures, in particular to Mr. Daniel Sargent, of Harvard University. And it is a special duty and pleasure to acknowledge my obligations to Professor Horace C. Longwell, of Princeton University, who has offered many valuable suggestions while assisting in the revision of the manuscript and in the task of seeing the work through the press.

Harvard University

January, 1922

ANALYTICAL TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1

i. Relational aspects of philosophy in the Middle Ages. ii. Methods. iii. The importance of the twelfth century and of the thirteenth century in mediaeval civilization. iv. Survey of these centuries.

CHAPTER TWO

SURVEY OF CIVILIZATION IN THE TWELFTH CENTURY 19

i. Feudal Europe. ii. Catholic influences: Cluny, Citeaux, the bishops, the Pope. iii. A new spirit: the value and dignity of the individual man. iv. New forms of art. v. The twelfth century one of French influences.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CIVILIZATION AS REFLECTED IN PHILOSOPHY 39

i. Location of philosophical schools; invasion of French schools by foreigners. ii. Delimitation of the several sciences; philosophy distinct from the seven liberal arts and from theology. iii. Harmony of the feudal sense of personal worth with the philosophical doctrine that the individual alone exists. iv. The feudal civilization and the anti-realistic solution of the problem of universals.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE GREAT AWAKENING OF PHILOSOPHY IN THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

62

i. The causes: The acquired momentum. ii. The rise of the Universities (Paris and Oxford). iii. The establishment of the mendicant orders (Dominicans and Franciscans). iv. The acquaintance with new philosophical works; translations. v. General result: among the numerous systems the scholastic philosophy issues as dominant. vi. The comprehensive classification of knowledge.

CHAPTER FIVE

UNIFYING AND COSMOPOLITAN TENDENCIES 99

- i. Need of universality; the "law of parsimony." ii. Excess resulting from the felt need of simplifying without limit; the geocentric system and the anthropocentric conception. iii. The society of mankind ("*universitas humana*") in its theoretical and practical forms. iv. Cosmopolitan tendencies.

CHAPTER SIX

OPTIMISM AND IMPERSONALITY 135

- i. Optimism in philosophy, in art, in religion. ii. Impersonality. iii. History of philosophy and literary attribution. iv. Perenniality.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SCHOLASTIC PHILOSOPHY AND THE RELIGIOUS SPIRIT 149

- i. Common definition of scholastic philosophy as a religious philosophy. ii. Reflective analysis of the distinction between philosophy and theology. iii. The religious spirit of the epoch. iv. Connections of philosophy with religion not affecting the integrity of the former. v. Subordination of philosophy to Catholic theology in the light of this analysis. vi. Solution and adjustment of the problem. vii. Influences of philosophy in other fields. Conclusion.

CHAPTER EIGHT

INTELLECTUALISM 179

- i. Intellectualism in ideology. ii. In epistemology. iii. In psychology (free volition). iv. More generally (psychology, logic, metaphysics, ethics, aesthetics). v. In other forms of culture.

CHAPTER NINE

A PLURALISTIC CONCEPTION OF THE WORLD 194

- i. What metaphysics is. ii. Static aspects of reality. iii. Dynamic aspects; the central doctrine of act and potency. iv. Application to substance and accident; to matter and form. v. The problem of individuation. vi. Human personality. vii. God: as pure existence.

CHAPTER TEN

INDIVIDUALISM AND SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY 219

- i. Social theory the last addition to scholastic philosophy. ii. Fundamental principle: the group exists for its members, and not conversely. iii. Ethical foundation of this principle. iv. The idea of the group in the teaching of canonists and jurists. v. Metaphysical basis: the group not an entity outside of its members. vi. Comparison of the group with the human body. vii. Conclusion.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE THEORY OF THE STATE 241

- i. Sovereignty from God. ii. It is a function; morality of governors not different from that of the governed; what the function implies. iii. Sovereignty resides in the people who delegate it. iv. The best form of government according to the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas. v. Making of laws the essential attribute of sovereignty: natural law and human law. vi. This form of government compared with the European states of the thirteenth century; with the modern nationalities; with the theories of preceding centuries.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE CONCEPTION OF HUMAN PROGRESS 264

- i. The constant and the permanent. ii. Progress in science, in morals, in social and political justice, in civilization.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

PHILOSOPHY AND NATIONAL TEMPERAMENT IN THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY 273

- i. Scholastic philosophy reflected in the temperament of the peoples who created it. ii. Three main doctrines: the value of the individual; intellectualism; moderation. iii. Scholastic philosophy the product of Neo-Latin and Anglo-Celtic minds; Germanic contribution virtually negligible. iv. Latin Averroism in the thirteenth century. v. The lure of Neo-Platonism to the German. vi. The chief doctrines opposed to the scholastic tendencies: lack of clearness; inclination to pantheism; deductive method *à outrance*; absence of moderation.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

EPILOGUE	297
i. Influence of thirteenth century philosophical systems on later thought in the West. ii. Pedagogical value of scholasticism for the history of modern philosophy.	
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	300
INDEX OF NAMES	308

PHILOSOPHY AND CIVILIZATION IN THE MIDDLE AGES

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

i. Relational aspects of philosophy in the Middle Ages. ii. Methods. iii. The importance of the twelfth century and of the thirteenth century in mediaeval civilization. iv. Survey of these centuries.

I

THE study of mediaeval philosophy has undergone considerable change in recent years, and the developments in this field of research have been important. On all sides the soil has been turned, and just as in archaeological excavation, as at Pompeii or at Timgad, here too discoveries unexpectedly rich are rewarding our search. For such men as John Scotus Eriugena, Anselm of Canterbury, Abaelard, Hugo of St. Victor, John of Salisbury, Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Siger of Brabant, Thierry of Freiburg, Roger Bacon, William of Occam,—these are truly thinkers of the first order, and their labours are worthy of the notable studies now increasingly made of them.

There is, further, a host of other philosophers whose thought has been unveiled, and whose significance will become the more clear as historical research progresses.

The study of mediaeval philosophy, however, has heretofore contented itself chiefly with establishing actual doctrines, and with indicating their development or the connection between one philosopher and another, while little attention has been given to the historical setting of these doctrines in the mediaeval civilization itself. But in the throbbing vitality of a civilization there is an interdependence of the numerous and complex elements constituting it; such, for example, are the economic well-being, the family and social institutions, the political and juridical systems, the moral and religious and aesthetic aspirations, the scientific and philosophical conceptions, the feeling for progress in human development. The interdependence of these various momenta is perhaps more readily apparent in the realms of economics and politics and art, but it is to be found also in the operation of the intellectual and moral factors.

It might seem at first sight that philosophy would enjoy a certain immunity from the vicissitudes of temporal change, because of the problems with which it deals; but closer view reveals that it too is caught inevitably within the meshes of the temporal net. For the work of Plato or of Aristotle, this is admitted as a commonplace by the historians

of philosophy; the thought of these philosophers reflects the conditions of the Athenian society of their day. Similarly, no one pretends to arrive at a proper understanding of such thinkers as Francis Bacon and Hobbes except in the light of the political and economic and the broadly cultural conditions of their age. Just so in our study of mediaeval philosophy, we may not properly consider Anselm, or Thomas Aquinas, or William of Occam as men whose thoughts float free without anchorage. They too are the sons of their age. Nay more, there is a certain philosophical atmosphere which is created by the collective thought of numerous thinkers; and this is subject to influences issuing from the spirit of the age, in its economic, political, social, moral, religious and artistic aspects. Moreover, while philosophical thought is thus affected from without, it also exerts its own influence in turn upon the general culture with which it is organically connected.

For the thought of the Middle Ages the time has come when we must take account of this mutual dependence. Indeed we may even regard with advantage the example of natural history, whose museums no longer exhibit their specimens as so many lifeless objects in a bare cage,—on the contrary, they are represented as if they were still alive in their native jungle.

The point of view, therefore, which we choose for our treatment in these lectures, is that of the

relational aspects in mediaeval philosophy—a study which relates the philosophy to the other factors in that civilization taken as an organic whole. We shall be concerned therefore less with isolated personalities than with the general philosophical mind of the age, its way of conceiving life and reality.

II

Before indicating the chronological limits and the general outline of our study, it is of paramount importance to examine a question of method which confronts us at the outset, the right solution of which is of great consequence:—Just how may we *understand* the mediaeval civilization in order to *judge* it aright?

To *understand* the mediaeval civilization,—to penetrate into its very spirit—we must first of all avoid forcing parallels with the mentality and customs of our own age. Many a study has been marred because its author was unable to resist this temptation. Mediaeval civilization is not the same as that of our own age. Its factors have a different meaning; they were made for men of a different age. Charlemagne's famous sword can now be wielded only with great difficulty, and the heavy armor of the iron-mailed knights no longer suits the needs of our twentieth-century soldiers. Nor is it otherwise with the mediaeval civilization considered as a whole; it is not fitted to our own conditions.

Further, in order to understand the Middle Ages, we must think directly after their manner of thinking. When a beginner commences the study of a foreign language, he is invariably advised to think directly in that language, instead of painfully translating words and phrases from his native tongue. Just so a right study of the civilization of the Middle Ages must take it in and for itself, in its internal elements and structure; it must be understood from within. To this end each factor must be separately considered and defined,—in itself and also with due regard to the particular significance attaching to it at any given epoch.

Furthermore, the several factors that make up a civilization should be collectively examined and viewed as a coherent whole; for only so is its unique harmony revealed. Such a harmony varies from one period to another. Therefore, we should violate the most elementary principles of historical criticism, if we were to predicate of the fifteenth century truths which apply only to the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries; or to attribute to formative periods such as the tenth and the eleventh centuries what is evidenced only in the central period of the Middle Ages.

If the above principles of internal criticism are necessary in discerning the spirit of mediaeval civilization, they are no less indispensable for arriving at a *just estimate* of that spirit. While this civilization is different from our own, it is not to be

judged as either worse or better. To determine its worth we must not compare its institutions with those of to-day. It is positively distressing to see historians, under the spell of special sympathies, proclaim the thirteenth century the best of all centuries of human history and prefer its institutions to our own. Such *laudatores temporis acti* really injure the cause which they intend to serve. But it is equally distressing to see others, more numerous, decry thirteenth-century civilization, and strenuously declaim against the imprudent dreamer who would carry certain of its ideas and customs into our modern world. To go back to the Middle Ages is out of the question; retrogression is impossible, for the past will ever be the past. To prefer to our railways, for instance, the long and perilous horseback rides of that age is of course absurd; but in the same way, to depreciate the Middle Ages by contrasting them at all with our modern ways of living, thinking, or feeling seems to me meaningless.

This would be tantamount to reviving the errors of the Renaissance, which was infatuated with its own world and disdained everything mediaeval.¹ This error has been strangely persistent, and it merits examination because of the lessons entailed. Disdain for the past begot ignorance, ignorance be-

¹ The very name "*Middle Ages*" was disparaging; it implied an intermediary stage, parenthetical, with no value saving that of connection between antiquity and modern times.

got injustice, injustice begot prejudice. Being unable or unwilling to go back to thirteenth-century documents, the critics of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries judged the whole period by reference to late and decadent scholasticism; the golden age was thus involved in the condemnation deserved only by the age of decadence. The historians of the eighteenth century, and of the beginning of the nineteenth century, inherited the estimate thus erroneously made by the men of the Renaissance and the Reformation; they accepted it uncritically and passed on the error unchanged. That, in brief, is the story of the perpetuation of the reproach attaching to the Middle Ages.²

A singular instance of the loss involved in thus failing to appreciate the merits of the past is the contempt which was professed for the "Gothic" architecture,—both because of its mediaeval origin and because the term came to be synonymous with "barbaric." One can understand, to be sure, how through ignorance or routine or education cultured minds in the Renaissance period might refuse to open dusty manuscripts and bulky folios; their preference for humanistic works,—such as those of Vives or of Agricola or of Nizolius or of others even more superficial—to the dry subtleties of the contemporary "terminists" is perfectly intelligible. But it is inconceivable to us how the great cathe-

² Cf. my *Histoire de la Philosophie Médiévale*, Louvain, 1912, p. 106.

drals of Paris, Rheims, Amiens, Chartres, Cologne, and Strasbourg failed to find favour with men of cultivated taste, and how they could have been included in the general condemnation of things mediaeval. For, those wonders in stone were not hidden in the recesses of library cases. On the contrary, they raised high above the cities their spires, their arches, their silhouettes,—and, indeed, as an heroic protest against the injustice of men. That a revival of Greek architecture might have aroused enthusiasm is easily intelligible; but it is hard to understand how Montesquieu, Fénelon, Goethe, who passed daily such Gothic cathedrals, could turn away from them and speak of them disparagingly and even refuse to cross their thresholds,—being, as they said, the remnants of a decadent age. Goethe's confession on this point is significant indeed. He tells us how at the beginning of his stay at Strasbourg, he was wont to pass the cathedral with indifference; but one day he entered, and as he did so his eyes were fascinated with a beauty which he had not before seen; thereafter, not only did he give up his prejudices against Gothic art, but he became enamoured of the beautiful cathedral that raises its red-brown spires above the plains of Alsace. "Educated among the detractors of Gothic architecture," he writes, "I nourished my antipathy against these overloaded, complicated ornaments, which gave the effect of gloomy religion by their very oddity. . . . But here I seemed suddenly to

see a new revelation; what had been objectionable appeared admirable, and the reverse,—the perception of beauty in all its attractiveness, was impressed on my soul.”³

The discredit in which mediaeval art was held has now definitely yielded to a more just estimate. Romanesque and Gothic architecture are now universally acknowledged to be things of beauty in and for themselves; certainly, in any case, without reference to the architecture of the twentieth century. Again, we acknowledge the merit of Giotto's frescoes, of the translucent stained glass of Chartres, without estimating them by modern standards of painting.

Similarly, no one today would commit himself to the prejudice, also not so old, that before Rousseau nature was not understood and that the thirteenth century was ignorant of its beauty. All of those who are familiar with the sculpture of the cathedrals and with illuminated manuscripts, or who have read the *Divine Comedy* of Dante and the poems of St. Francis, know how unjust that reproach is; and they never compare the thirteenth-century interpretation of nature with that of our modern writers.

This marked contrast, between our appreciation of mediaeval art and the condemnation of it in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, indicates the canons to which we should adhere in reaching a just

³ Goethe, *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Buch IX, Teil 2.

judgement of the past. Plainly, in order to understand the value of things mediaeval, we must have recourse to a standard other than that set by the conditions of our own time. For, what is true of art is also true of all other factors in a civilization.

If, then, we are to estimate aright the civilization of the thirteenth century, we must refer it to a fixed norm: *the dignity and the worth of human nature*. This will be readily granted by all who believe that human nature remains essentially the same, in spite of historical changes; and of course this was the common mediaeval doctrine.⁴ By this standard a civilization stands high when it achieves its own intense and coordinated expression of the essential aspirations of the individual and the collective life; when it realizes, in addition, an adequate degree of material welfare; when it rests also on a rational organization of the family, the state, and other groups; when it allows, further, for full development in philosophy, science and art; and when its morality and its religion foster their ideals on a basis of noble sentiments and refined emotions. In this sense the civilization of the thirteenth century must be counted among those that have succeeded in attaining to a high degree of perfection; for, certain unique functions and aspirations of humanity are therein revealed, and indeed in rare and striking form. Hence it furnishes us with documents of the first importance for our under-

⁴ See ch. XII, i.

standing of humanity; and for this reason it may instruct our present generation as it surely can all those to come. *Homo sum, nil humani a me alienum puto.*

From this point of view, and from this alone, may we properly call good or bad—let us not say better or worse—certain elements in our heritage from the Middle Ages. The praise or the blame which may be given to things mediaeval in these lectures will not proceed from a comparison of mediaeval conditions *with those of our own age*, but rather by reference to their harmony, or lack of it, with the *essential nobility of human nature*. We may speak then of things good and beautiful achieved by the Middle Ages; for they are human realities, even though they are enveloped within the historical past. The *Fioretti* of St. Francis, the *Divine Comedy* of Dante, the cathedrals, the feudal virtues, these are all sparks of the human soul, *scintillae animae*, whose lustre cannot be obscured; they have their message for all of humanity. And if certain doctrines in scholastic philosophy have maintained their value, as have certain doctrines of Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Descartes, Leibnitz, and others, this must be because they have a deeply human meaning which remains everlastingly true.

Within these limits it would be neither proper nor possible to abstain from praise and criticism. For, the historian is no mere registering machine, unmoved by love and hatred. On the contrary, he

cannot be indifferent to good and evil, to progress and decline, to lofty aspirations and social evils; therefore, he cannot refrain from approving and condemning.

III

This method of historical reconstruction and appreciation is especially necessary in studying the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries,—perhaps more so than for any other mediaeval period. To this period, as the very heart of the Middle Ages, we shall limit our study, and for certain reasons which we may now consider.

First of all, this is the period when mediaeval civilization assumes definite form, with outlines and features that characterize a unique age in the life of humanity.

Before the end of the eleventh century, the mediaeval temperament is not yet formed; it is only in process of elaboration. The new races, Celts and Teutons⁵ (the Teutons including more especially Angles, Danes, Saxons, Franks, Germans, and Normans) had passively received something of the culture of the Graeco-Roman world, certain elements of organization, juridical and political, and some fragmentary scientific and philosophical ideas. During the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries, these new races react upon what they have received

⁵ The terms Teuton and German are sometimes employed in the inverse sense; but I prefer the usage above indicated.

and subject everything to an elaboration of their own. They apply themselves to it, with their virtues and their defects; and the outcome begets the new order of things. Christianity directs the whole work,—and it is not a light task to soften the rough mentality of the barbarians. The work is nearly completed at the dawn of the twelfth century, and the period of groping is over. Thus there are three factors in the process of forming the mediaeval civilization: the heritage from the ancient world, the reactive response of the new races, and the directing guidance of Christianity.

With the twelfth century the results of this long and gradual process of formation begin to appear. This is the springtime period. And just as the springtime of nature excludes no plant from her call to life, so the springtime of civilization buds forth in every branch of human activity; political, economic, family and social régime, morals, religion, fine arts, sciences, philosophy,—all of those sublime emanations of the human soul which form a civilization, and determine its progress, now reveal their abounding vitality and burst forth in bloom. Of these factors, the political organization ripens first, very naturally, while philosophy comes to its maturity the last of all. The former is, as it were, the body; the latter belongs to the complex psychic life. And since civilization is essentially the expression of psychic forces, the real mediaeval man must be sought for in his religious

feelings, his moral aspirations, his artistic work, his philosophical and scientific activities.

With the thirteenth century we reach definitely the climax of the development,—that is, the period of maturity. At this stage the total complex of the mediaeval civilization reveals its striking and compelling features.

A second reason exists for concentrating our attention upon the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. These are also the centuries in which the philosophical temperament of the Occident is definitely formed.

All historians agree in ascribing to the French genius the leadership of the world during this period. It was in France that the feudal mind was formed. A moral, artistic, and religious tradition began to appear on the soil of French provinces. Chivalry, feudalism, the Benedictine organization, monastic and religious reforms, Romanesque and Gothic art are just so many products born of the French temperament; and these spread throughout the whole western world by virtue of the current travel and trade, the Crusades and the migrations of religious orders. From France the ideas of the new civilization spread over the neighboring countries, like sparks from a blazing fire. The twelfth and the thirteenth centuries were centuries of French thought; and this leadership of France was retained until the Hundred Years War. Naturally, therefore, the same leadership was maintained in the field of philosophy, as we shall see.

Moreover, the thirteenth century is the period when both the Neo-Latin and the Anglo-Celtic minds distinguished themselves clearly from the Germanic type. If one seeks the origin of the difference in mentality found in the nations of the West, one is forced inevitably back to the thirteenth century. This century witnessed the formation of the great European nations, the dawn of a more definite conception of *patria*, the decisive outlining of the ethnical features of the peoples who were henceforth to fill history with their alliances and rivalries. The thirteenth century is characterized by unifying and cosmopolitan tendencies; but, at the same time, it constitutes a great plateau whence are beginning to issue the various channels which will later run as mighty rivers in different and even opposite directions. Many peculiarities in the mediaeval way of conceiving individual and social life and many of their philosophical conceptions of the world have entered into the modern views; and, indeed, many doctrines which are now opposed to each other can be traced to their origin in the thirteenth century.

IV

We may now outline broadly the plan of these lectures. From the general point of view, the twelfth century is perhaps of more decisive importance. But from the philosophical standpoint the thirteenth century is supreme, and therefore it will demand more of our time and attention. This

difference is due to the fact that civilization always develops more rapidly than philosophy, the latter being a tender fruit which thrives tardily and only when the general growth has been attained.

The twelfth century is a creative and constructive era, and the development of thought and of life is extraordinarily rapid in all directions. All the forces are in ebullition, as in a crucible. The heritage from the Graeco-Roman world, the reaction of the new races, the direction of Christianity: these three factors in the making of mediaeval civilization are now in process of compounding, and the result is a conception of life, individual and social, which is *sui generis*. A new spirit pervades the policy of kings. The particularism of the local lords comes into diverse conflict with the aspirations of the central power, whilst the rural classes welcome the dawn of liberty and the townsfolk awake to the possibilities of vast commercial enterprises. Men are seeking governmental forms in which all classes of society can find their place and play their part. The Crusades, once begun, recur at brief intervals and bring the various peoples together and direct their attention to the Orient; at the same time they foster in a manner hitherto unparalleled the ideal of a great human brotherhood, resting upon the Christian religion. The Church pervades all circles, through her monks, her clerics, her bishops. The Papacy, which has been central since the days of Gregory VII, assumes international significance and gradually organizes itself

into a theocratic government. The customs of feudalism and of chivalry arise, as characteristic of the age. The early mediaeval man is developing; he may go to excess in his virtues and his vices, but beneath his rough exterior he cherishes a Christian ideal, and often at the cost of his life. A new form of art arises which finds its most ardent promoters in Churchmen. Other Churchmen give themselves to the cultivation of science and letters, and thus are laid the foundations of that imposing philosophical monument, scholasticism, which is to guide and direct the thought of centuries. Thus philosophy is only one of the elements in this new civilization. In reality it receives more than it gives. Some of the influences which operated upon it from the surrounding environment we shall outline in due time.⁶ But first we shall make a rapid survey of French mediaeval society and of the type of mentality which passed over from it to the intellectual circles of the West.⁷ Concluding the present chapter, let us consider briefly the thirteenth century.

In the thirteenth century mediaeval civilization brings forth its full fruit. The feudal monarchy receives into its organic being all those social forces which make for national life. Material welfare increases and the relations between nations grow apace. Art speeds on its triumphal way. Gothic architecture springs up beside the Romanesque; painting comes into existence; and literature be-

⁶ See ch. III.

⁷ See ch. II.

gins to take wing in a flight which issues in Humanism. Religion contributes more than ever to unity; it enters into all the sentiments and the life of the age. The Papacy reaches the apex of its power; and, supreme over kings and emperors, it dominates every aspect of social activity. Everywhere a sort of stable equilibrium prevails. Men are proud of the way in which they have organized human existence. Philosophical ideas and systems appear in abundance, exhibiting a luxuriance unequalled since the Hellenistic age.⁸ Among these numerous systems scholasticism is most in harmony with the age, and as its completest expression becomes the reigning philosophy. Its roots are to be found everywhere in the civilization of the thirteenth century. First, because it exhibits those relational aspects which unite it with all the other spheres of activity.⁹ Second, because many of its doctrines bear the stamp of characteristically mediaeval ideas, both social and moral.¹⁰ Third, because scholasticism is above all, the philosophy of those people who are at the head of the cultural movement in the thirteenth century.¹¹ In what follows we shall endeavour to substantiate these statements.

⁸ See ch. IV.

⁹ See chs. V-VII.

¹⁰ See chs. VIII-XII.

¹¹ See ch. XIII.

CHAPTER TWO

SURVEY OF CIVILIZATION IN THE TWELFTH CENTURY

i. Feudal Europe. ii. Catholic influences: Cluny, Cîteaux, the bishops, the Pope. iii. A new spirit: the value and dignity of the individual man. iv. New forms of art. v. The twelfth century one of French influences.

I

To understand how the civilization of the twelfth century is reflected in its philosophy, we must view in a general way the elements of that civilization which are most intimately connected with intellectual life,—namely, political institutions, moral and social ideals, standards of art, and religious beliefs.

These several elements operate in various ways in the different countries of Europe; but in our general survey we shall consider rather the resemblances, without meaning thereby to deny or to belittle the differences. Since it is in France that this civilization produces its choicest fruits, it is there especially that we must seek its most original and coherent forms.

In the political and social orders feudalism had become general. Barons, dukes, earls, and lords lived independently in their own castles and usurped more or less of the sovereign right. Not

only did relations of personal loyalty exist between them, but obligations founded upon a free contract bound one man to another, according to some privilege or some land given and received. The one, the vassal, was bound to render service; the other, the lord, was equally bound to protect and defend.

In France, where the new organization appears in its purest form, nothing is more complicated than the scheme of feudalistic relations. At the head, theoretically, but not always practically, stood the king. The greatest lords were vassals of other lords. Were not the feudal relations of Henry II of England and Louis VII of France the starting point for all their wars and quarrels? For, the first became the vassal of the second on the very day he married Eleanor of Aquitaine, whose duchy was granted by the French king to the English monarch. The particular and local lords were forced to fight against the centralizing tendencies of the kings, and the antagonism of the vassals and the king, their suzerain, was the main feature of French policy in the twelfth century.¹ Particularism remained, but it was on the decline, and the following century witnessed the triumph of the centralizing principle.

A similar development occurred in England. For, that country was so closely connected with France that their combined territories may be called

¹ A. Luchaire, "Louis VII, Philippe Auguste, Louis VIII," *Histoire de France*, pub. par Lavissee, 1902, vol. III.

the common soil of the mediaeval civilization. English society, as a whole, had its origin in French soil; at any rate, the seeds were planted in 1066 by William the Conqueror and his French barons, Kings of French blood, who came from Normandy and from Anjou, ruled over the British Isles; but much of their time was spent in their French provinces. French was the court-language; they made provision for burial in the Norman abbey of Caen or the Angevine abbey of Fontevrault; they drew their counsellors from France and favoured the establishment of French clergy and French monks in England. The English King Henry II, the first of the Plantagenet dynasty, was one of the most thorough-going organizers of the age; indeed one might well take him for a contemporary of Philip the Fair of France.² Is it then surprising that we find England too being divided into feudal domains, and the royal policy exhibiting the same centralizing tendency?

But while monarchy and feudalism were so closely akin in France and in England, they presented quite a different aspect in Germany. The reason was that at the very time when the king's power was weakening in France, the Saxon dynasty of the Ottos had established in Germany an autocratic régime, patterned after that of Charlemagne. The German kings, who had been crowned Emperors

² A. Luchaire, *op. cit.*, p. 49. Henry II, 1133-1189; Philip the Fair, 1269-1314.

of the West, held the nobles in a sort of military servitude; they appointed bishops and abbots and bound them to military service. However, little by little, the principalities asserted their rights; the fast developing towns gained more freedom. We shall see³ how the monks of Cluny contributed to this change. Thus, by a process of decentralization, Germany gradually assumed in the twelfth century a more feudal aspect, while France and England were developing toward centralization.

During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the destiny of Italy is intimately connected with that of Germany. The reason for this was that the German imperial ambitions involved the seizure of Italy, a great country which was also divided into various principalities. The emperors were successful for a time; but much opposition developed. Hence their long struggle against the Lombard cities, which were true municipal republics; against the Papacy, which was to triumph finally; against the great southern realm of the Sicilies, which had been founded by Norman knights and was a centre of French feudal ideas, being governed by French princes.

As for Spain, situated as it was on the confines of the western and the Arabian civilizations, it presents a unique aspect. The Christian kingdoms of Castille, of León, of Navarre, of Aragon, had undertaken to "reconquer" the Peninsula from the

³ See ch. II, ii.

Mussulman, and they were organized on French feudal principles. On the other hand, the South remained in the hands of the Infidels, and the infiltration of Arabian civilization was to have its part in the philosophical awakening of the thirteenth century, as we shall see.⁴

Hence, when we consider the outstanding features of the political and social situation, feudal divisions are found everywhere. France, which seems to be the starting point for the system, England after the Conquest, some parts of Italy and of Spain, and also Germany—the whole of western Europe, in fact, presents the appearance of a checkerboard.

II

The Catholic Church was intimately connected with this feudal system, through her bishops, who were lords both temporal and spiritual, and more especially through the abbots of her monasteries. The twelfth century is the golden age of the abbeys. In no period of history has any institution had a closer contact with both religious and social background than had the abbeys of Cluny and Cîteaux. These were the two great branches of the Benedictine stem, the two mother-houses whose daughters were scattered throughout France and Europe.

The ninth century had witnessed a disastrous relaxation of religious discipline, and it was Cluny

⁴ See ch. IV, iv.

which first returned to the faithful observance of the rule of St. Benedict. The monastery was founded in Burgundy in 910 by a feudal lord, Duke William of Aquitaine. And just here we meet with a peculiar phenomenon, which shows how the religious spirit had become the great moral force of that period. "The abbeys built in the ninth and the tenth centuries," says Reynaud,⁵ "to restore the ancient rule of St. Benedict, were all, or nearly all, the work of the military class." After a life of adventure and war, or after a stormy youth, these proud feudal lords often shut themselves up in cloisters, to do penance. They renounced the world, and henceforth their austerities were performed with the same ardour which they had formerly exhibited in their exploits of war. Thus, Poppo of Stavelot was affianced to a wealthy heiress, when one evening, on his way home after visiting her, a bright light suddenly shone about him; whereupon he was terrified, and in remorse for his past life he donned the Benedictine cowl. Examples of such conversions are numerous.

The monks of Cluny not only instilled a new religious zeal within their own cloister, not only did they restore discipline and vows and piety, not only did they sustain and augment the fervid faith of the people depending on them; they also awakened the same spirit in a great many other monasteries.

⁵ L. Reynaud, *Les origines de l'influence française en Allemagne*, Paris, 1913, p. 43.